

52 WEEK 42, revised 12-5-06  
**(NO ART CHANGES UNTIL PAGE SEVENTEEN!)**

20pgs

Johns: 0pgs; Morrison: 0pgs; Rucka: 2pgs; Waid: 18pgs

Page 1

ONE:

Dark panel. Small.

1 CAPTION: Week 42, Day 5.

2 CAPTION/locator: Nanda Parbat.

TWO:

Stet panel one.

3 SFX/small: krch krtch

COPY TBD

THREE:

On a MATCH flaring to life.

4 SFX: fwsshhh

COPY TBD

FOUR:

The MATCH being touched to the CANDLE we saw Montoya blowing out in *Week 41*.

5 TAILLESS/small: I'm afraid.

COPY TBD

FIVE:

Very close, on MONTROYA'S HAND picking up the CANDLE. The FLAME reflects around us in the polished walls of the Ice Cave, but there should be no view of Renee as yet.

COPY TBD

Page 1 – cont'd

SIX:

CU on MONTAYA, holding the CANDLE up; she's been sitting in this cold darkness, alone, for a week. She looks wasted, exhausted, matted hair, the wad.

Here EYES are CLOSED TIGHT.

COPY TBD.

**KEITH:** Add the DC COMICS 52 to page 1. Credits will appear later.

Page 2

ONE/TWO/THREE:

Figure these are all on the same horizontal. The same ECU of MONT0YA'S EYES, beginning with them squeezed SHUT in Panel One, to wide open in wonder in PANEL THREE.

COPY TBD

FOUR:

Big panel, past MONT0YA, reveal. Seated in the lotus position in the Ice Cave, the reflections of herself all around her. Some perfect, some distorted, but all now visible in the light of the candle.

She looks exactly as she does "for real" – dirty clothes, matted hair, etc. – but her face has NO FEATURES, as if she was wearing Vic's mask.

COPY TBD.

### PAGE THREE

PANEL ONE: NIGHT. ESTABLISHING SHOT, DR. FATE'S TOWER. THERE ARE TWO OBJECTS CIRCLING IT AT GREAT SPEED IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS AND OPPOSING ANGLES, LEAVING BRIGHT CONTRAILS LIKE COMETS--ONE GOLD, ONE SILVER.

1 DATESTAMP:    Week 42, Day 3  
                     Salem, Massachusetts

PANEL TWO: WRITING CREDITS.

PANEL THREE: CLOSER, SO WE CAN SEE THE ACTUAL OBJECTS THAT ARE IN FLIGHT--THE SILVER WHEEL OF NYORLATH FROM LAST ISSUE AND THE GIANT GOLDEN CHAIN-LINK FROM THE ATLANTIS SEQUENCE.

2 DATESTAMP:    The Tower of Fate.

PANEL FOUR: ART CREDITS.

PANEL FIVE: INTERIOR, FATE'S TOWER. DARK, SHADOWY, TORCHLIT--THE USUAL. WE'RE CLOSE ON THE FLOATING FATE HELMET, AND IN ITS REFLECTION, WE CAN SEE (NOT CRYSTAL-CLEARLY, BUT CLEARLY ENOUGH) AN IMAGE OF RALPH SWIGGING HIGH FROM HIS FLASK.

4 FATE:            The hour is upon us, Ralph Dibny. I have  
                     taught you all I CAN.

**PAGE FOUR, REVISED**

PANEL ONE: TIGHT ON RALPH'S TREMBLING HANDS AS HE CAPS THE FLASK.

1 FATE/off:      The next step must be yours and yours alone...

PANEL TWO: EDITORIAL CREDITS. WE'LL SAVE THE STORY TITLE UNTIL AFTER THE OPENING SEQUENCE.

PANEL THREE: ANGLE ON THREE OR FOUR MYSTIC ARTIFACTS WHICH HANG AT ABOUT CHEST-LEVEL IN MID-AIR--ARCANE AMULETS, MAGIC TOMES AND SCROLLS AND GEMS, WHATEVER SAYS "ARCANE" TO YOU. RALPH'S TREMBLING HANDS ENTER THE SHOT. ONE HAND HOLDS A SNAPSHOT OF SUE, AND THE OTHER HAS THE BALL OF ITS THUMB PRESSING THE TOP OF THE PHOTO TO ONE OF THE ARTIFACTS, LIKE YOU'D APPLY A THUMB TACK. THERE'S A SLIGHT GLOW OF MAGIC ENERGY UNDER THAT THUMB, AND ALL THE OTHER VISIBLE ARTIFACTS LIKEWISE HAVE SNAPSHOTS ALREADY ATTACHED WITH "MAGIC THUMB TACKS," IF YOU WILL.

2 FATE/off:      ...if you are to achieve your HEART'S DESIRE.

PANEL FOUR, BIG: ESTABLISHING INTERIOR. RALPH--CLEAN-SHAVEN AND IN CLEAN STREET CLOTHES, AS WE FIRST SAW HIM (BECAUSE WHO WANTS TO MEET HIS WIFE IN THE AFTERLIFE WITHOUT LOOKING HIS BEST?)--STANDS UPON A LARGE MYSTIC SIGIL ON THE STONE FLOOR. TEARS STREAM DOWN HIS FACE, BUT HE'S OTHERWISE RATHER STOIC. AROUND HIM, IN A CIRCLE, HOVER SEVEN MYSTIC ARTIFACTS IN TOTAL, SNAPSHOTS ATTACHED TO ALL. MOST ARE JUST OF SUE, BUT AT LEAST ONE MUST BE OF SUE AND RALPH, HAPPY, LAUGHING, IN THEIR PRIME.

THE FATE HELMET HOVERS NEXT TO HIM.

IMPORTANT COLOR NOTE--AS WE DID EARLY ON WITH RALPH, WE NEED TO KEEP HIM IN TASTEFUL SHADES OF PURPLE OR LAVENDER AND MAYBE WHITE. NOTHING GARISH, JUST A NOD TO HIS CLASSIC LOOK.

3 FATE:            I remember your wife FONDLY, Ralph.

PAGE FIVE, revised 12/5/06  
(revised dialogue marked \*)

PANEL ONE: FATE'S EYES GLOW WITH MAGIC--

1 FATE: Just as she still remembers YOU.

PANEL TWO: --AND AS THE HOVERING ARTIFACTS BEGIN TO GLOW,  
THE SUES IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS START TO TAKE ON A THIRD  
DIMENSION--

PANEL THREE: --SMILING, HAPPY, REACHING OUT WARMLY AND  
INVITINGLY TO RALPH.

2 ALL IMAGES/tiny: Ralph

PANEL FOUR: FATE, RALPH. RALPH STILL HAS TEARS STREAMING  
DOWN HIS FACE BUT ISN'T OPENLY SOBBING; HE'S A LITTLE  
FEARFUL, A LITTLE SHAKEN AND VERY NERVOUS ABOUT THIS, THE  
FINAL STEP IN HIS JOURNEY.

3 FATE: Release your FEAR, Ralph. Release your  
PAIN.

4 FATE: We have PRACTICED the INCANTATION. Give it  
UTTERANCE...

\*5 FATE: ...and the door to the afterlife will OPEN  
long enough for you to step THROUGH and find  
SUSAN. There will be PAIN...that is the  
COST of MAGIC...but after THAT, only JOY.

6 RALPH: Fate, what if...what if I can't control the  
POWER...?

**PAGE SIX**

PANEL ONE: FATE, RALPH. THE SNAPSHOTS SUES CONTINUE TO REACH FOR RALPH LIKE THE SIRENS OF MYTH.

1 ALL IMAGES/small: Ralph

2 FATE:                You YOURSELF used the LINK and the WHEEL to enact the spells of BINDING, Ralph.

3 FATE:                The outside world is safe from whatever takes place in these next few minutes.

4 FATE:                Brace yourself...and take the STEP.

PANEL TWO: ANGLE ON RALPH, STILL WORRIED.

5 RALPH:              Wait...suppose I haven't STUDIED enough...or haven't SACRIFICED enough...

6 FATE:                You have. You're ready.

7 RALPH:              If I'm...if I'm NOT...

8 FATE:                Ralph, the alignments are CLOSING. The spell is losing its POTENCY.

9 FATE:                DO AS WE PREPARED.

PANEL THREE: RALPH, OVERWROUGHT, ON THE VERGE OF BREAKING DOWN AGAIN, TAKES ONE LAST, BRACING SWIG FROM THE FLASK.

10 RALPH:             I HAVE TO BE WITH HER. I can't...risk screwing it UP. Not now. Not after going through so much.

11 RALPH/small:      There's one surer way.

((more))

**PAGE SIX, continued**

PANEL FOUR: RALPH, HANDS EMPTY AGAIN (HAVING STASHED THE FLASK), REACHES BOTH HANDS OUT TOWARDS THE FLOATING HELMET.

12 FATE:           Ralph, trust in all that you have LEARNED.  
                    Trust in ME.

13 FATE:           WHATEVER leap you take NOW, Ralph...I SWEAR  
                    to you that our DESTINIES are forever  
                    INTERTWINED.

PANEL FIVE: RALPH TAKES THE HELMET IN HIS HANDS--

14 RALPH:           I know.

PANEL SIX:    --AND, IN A SMALL, SILHOUETTED SHOT, SLIPS IT  
ON.



**PAGE SEVEN**

PANEL ONE, HUGE: ONE OF THE BIG MONEY-SHOTS WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, AND IT'S GLORIOUS. RALPH STANDS THERE, ARMS AKIMBO, A REAL ORIGIN MOMENT, WEARING THE GLOWING FATE HELMET.

PANEL TWO: TIGHT ON RALPH'S HAND, AS IT PULLS THE ANSELMO-CASE GUN OUT OF HIS POCKET, ITS TAG VISIBLE AND LEGIBLE AS IT'S ALWAYS BEEN.

1 TAG:                ANSELMO CASE  
                         1995

[Lettering--match to issue one, page three, thanks]

PANEL THREE: TIGHT ON RALPH/FATE AS RALPH'S HAND LIFTS THE MUZZLE OF THE GUN TO HIS TEMPLE--

PANEL FOUR: --AND SUPER-TIGHT ON HIS FINGER AS IT PULLS THE TRIGGER.

**PAGE EIGHT**

PANEL ONE, HUGE: AND HERE'S WHAT HAPPENS.

WE DON'T SEE THE "BULLET"--BUT WE DO SEE ITS EFFECT.  
RALPH'S BRAINS DO NOT BLOW OUT OF HIS OPPOSITE TEMPLE. IN  
FACT, AS WE'LL SEE, HE'S UNHARMED. INSTEAD, THE VISUAL IS  
AS IF THE BULLET PASSED THROUGH HIM AND--AS IT EXPLODES  
VIOLENTLY THROUGH THE FAR SIDE OF THE HELMET--IS PULLING IT  
OFF WITH ITS MOMENTUM AS IF, IN THIS MOMENT, THE HELMET IS  
MORE GELATINOUS THAN SOLID, STARTING TO PEEL OFF FROM  
RALPH'S GUN-SIDE HEAD AS THE "BULLET" TUGS IT AWAY.

PANELS: THE HELMET--ROCKETING ACROSS THE ROOM, CARRIED  
FORCEFULLY BY THE IMPACT OF THE BLAST--BEGINS TO SHRINK AND  
RE-FORM AS IT GOES, COALESCING FROM SOMETHING THAT LOOKS  
LIKE A FLUNG BOWL OF PUDDING INTO A NEW SHAPE--

--AND AS A SCREAMING, INDISTINCT, AMORPHOUS ROBED SPIRIT  
CATAPULTS FROM THE HELMET AS IF YANKED FREE, THE FALLING,  
STILL-SHRINKING HELMET BEGINS TO TAKE NEW FORM--

--AND, BOUNCING SLIGHTLY, ONCE MORE TAKES ON ITS TRUE FORM  
AS IT HITS THE FLOOR.

IT'S RALPH'S WEDDING RING.

1 SFX:                tink

**PAGE NINE**

PANEL ONE: TIGHT ON THE RING AS IT ROLLS TO A STOP NEXT TO THE ROBED FIGURE, NOW CORPOREAL, SITTING/COWERING IN A HEAP AGAINST THE WALL.

PANEL TWO: PULL BACK TO REVEAL THAT IT'S A TERRIFIED FELIX FAUST, LOOKING UP AND OFF.

1 FAUST/nervous:     You...you KNEW it was ME...?

2 FAUST/nervous:     How...?

PANEL THREE, SPLASH: FAUST'S POV, LOOKING UP AT RALPH, WHO HOLDS THE SMOKING GUN. RALPH IS AS INTENSE AND STEELY AND HEROIC AS WE'VE YET SEEN HIM IN THIS SERIES. HE'S LIKE A DAMN DOC SAVAGE PAINTING, AND THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THERE ISN'T A SHRED OF WEAKNESS LEFT IN THIS MAN AND THAT HE MEANS BUSINESS.

3 RALPH:             BECAUSE, Faust...

4 RALPH:             ...I'm a DETECTIVE.

5 TITLE:             TRIGGER EFFECT

**PAGE TEN**

PANEL ONE: THE NO-LONGER-FLOATING ARTIFACTS FALL TO THE FLOOR, BOUNCING.

PANEL TWO: AS RALPH EDGES CLOSER TO HIM--NOT BRANDISHING THE GUN, SIMPLY HOLDING IT, BUT LOOKING INTIMIDATING NONETHELESS--FAUST SCRAMBLES TO HIS FEET.

1 RALPH:           Your little CHARADE wasn't unclever.  
                      Surprisingly, for you. Did you have help  
                      concocting this plan?

2 RALPH:           No. Of course not. That familiar stink of  
                      DESPERATION is all YOU.

PANEL THREE: FLASHBACK TO RALPH REACTING TO THE HORROR OF WICKER SUE.

3 CAPTION:        "The warehouse. The wicker doll. There was  
                      no Kryptonian resurrection, was there?

4 CAPTION:        "It was YOU, working your MAGIC from behind  
                      the SCENES...

PANEL FOUR: FLASHBACK TO ISSUE THIRTEEN, LAST PAGE, THE SCENE OF RALPH CLINGING TO WICKER SUE--BUT THIS TIME ANGLED PAST THE TINY MYSTERY FIGURE IN THE BACKGROUND, REVEALED AT LAST TO BE FAUST, MAYBE IN A TRENCHCOAT, YOUR CALL (BUT WITH THE FAMILIAR HEADGEAR REGARDLESS).

5 CAPTION:        "...trying to give me just enough HOPE to  
                      HANG myself."

PANEL FIVE: CAT AND MOUSE. FAUST, APPARENTLY TERRIFIED, RUNS FROM RALPH.

6 RALPH:           You had to have been on the scene to have  
                      stumbled across my WEDDING RING...something  
                      you could use as a TOTEM for SPIRITUAL  
                      POSSESSION.

7 RALPH/small:    God, you and your thing for FINGERS...you  
                      idiot.

8 RALPH:           Go ahead. RUN. There's no EXIT. Spells of  
                      BINDING, Faust.

9 RALPH: They weren't for MY benefit. They were for  
YOU.

## PAGES ELEVEN THROUGH TWELVE

PANEL ONE: FLASHBACK. THE WEDDING RING IS MORPHING INTO THE HELM OF FATE AS FAUST TURNS ETHEREAL AND WAFTS INTO IT.

1 CAPTION: "Anyway...spiritual POSSESSION. To lead me along your twisted path, you had to take the form of a magic guide I'd TRUST...like the HELM OF FATE.

2 CAPTION: "You couldn't simply pop up in FRONT of me, though. Too PAT. Better I find YOU.

PANEL TWO: FLASHBACK TO ISSUE EIGHTEEN. TIM TRENCH SITS ALONE AT THE TABLE IN THE MEETING ROOM OF THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY, DONS THE HELMET OF FATE. NOTE ONCE MORE THAT TRENCH'S HANDS ARE NORMAL AND UNGLOVED, AND ALL TEN FINGERTIPS TOUCH THE HELMET AS HE LOWERS IT OVER HIS HEAD.

3 CAPTION: "So you played the CROATOANS. They pulled me in because they found Tim Trench DEAD...

4 CAPTION: "...and YOU told me it was because he'd tried to assume your POWER without PRECAUTION."

[KEITH--PACE THE REAL-TIME, SLOW, JUNGLE-CAT-ADVANCING-ON-HIS-PREY CHASE AS YOU WILL, NATCH.]

PANELS: BACK TO RALPH (THE HUNTER) AND FAUST (THE HUNTED, SCRAMBLING THROUGH THE DEPTHS OF THE TOWER, MOVING AMIDST THE VARIOUS MAGIC ARTIFACTS TUCKED AWAY HERE AND THERE, SEEKING ESCAPE OR PERHAPS SOME MAGIC WEAPON TO TURN AGAINST RALPH). OBVIOUSLY, SOME OF RALPH'S BALLOONS CAN COME FROM OFF-PANEL AS FAUST GAINS SOME GROUND.

5 RALPH: That was the first of the many, MANY cautionary tales with which you assumed you'd earned my CONFIDENCE.

6 RALPH: And, to your credit, given how emotionally damaged I was, you might HAVE.

7 RALPH: EXCEPT.

((more))

**PAGES ELEVEN AND TWELVE, continued**

8 RALPH: I concluded VERY early on that, WHOEVER you were, you were LYING to me about how Trench DIED...and, therefore, probably much MORE.

9 RALPH: Oh, I was GUARDED from the START. Again, your OFFER coincided with my NEED awfully CONVENIENTLY, Faust.

10 RALPH: But MISGIVING wasn't EVIDENCE. It wasn't the one clue I REQUIRED to CLINCH my SUSPICIONS.

11 RALPH: No. THAT came out of your own characteristic OVEREAGERNESS. You actually SHOWED me a vision of Tim's DEATH, Faust. You SHOWED yourself IN HIS HANDS.

PANELS: FAR ENOUGH AHEAD OF RALPH AND/OR AROUND CORNERS, AS HE'S METHODICALLY PURSUED, FAUST FINDS WHAT HE'S LOOKING FOR--SOME COOL MAGIC WAND.

12 RALPH: Victim of a LOCKED-ROOM MURDER where YOU were the WEAPON.

13 RALPH: The shiny metal MURDER WEAPON that was brought to me...sheathed by the Croatoans and untouched...with its GLEAMING FINISH so utterly, UTTERLY FLAWLESS.

14 RALPH: And what's the first thing you DO with a MURDER WEAPON, Felix?

PANEL: VERY TIGHT ON RALPH AS HE TURNS A CORNER--

15 RALPH: You look

16 RALPH: for

17 RALPH: PRINTS.

PANEL: --AND, CAUGHT DEAD IN FAUST'S SIGHTS, FAUST UNLOADS A BOLT OF MAGIC ENERGY DIRECTLY AT RALPH--



**PAGE THIRTEEN**

PANEL ONE, BIG--ANOTHER HUGE MOMENT WORTHY OF A HALF-PAGE:  
--AND RALPH S-T-R-E-T-C-H-E-S ACROSS THE ROOM IN HIS  
ELONGATED FORM, AVOIDING THE BOLT AND FLATTENING FAUST WITH  
ONE PUNCH, CAUSING HIM TO DROP THE WAND.

1 RALPH:           Gotcha.

PANEL TWO: FAUST, NOW GENUINELY SCARED, NOT JUST PUTTING  
ON A SHOW, FLEES IN ABJECT (AND EMPTY-HANDED) HORROR.  
RALPH ELONGATES IN PURSUIT, WAVING HIS CLOSED FLASK IN A  
“HEY, LOOK AT THIS” GESTURE.

2 RALPH:           Not BOOZE, Faust.

3 RALPH:           GINGOLD.

4 RALPH:           And not even my final surprise.

PANEL THREE: ELONGATED RALPH--CLEARLY HOLDING THE GUN--  
BODY-CHECKS FAUST VICIOUSLY INTO SHELVING OR A TABLE OR  
SOMESUCH, SCATTERING MAGIC ARTIFACTS EVERY WHICH WAY.

5 FAUST/burst: HNNGGGH!

PANEL FOUR: FAUST, ON HIS KNEES BEFORE RALPH, FROZEN IN  
TERROR. RALPH, IN NORMAL, UN-ELONGATED FORM ONCE MORE AND  
FROM HERE ON OUT, PUTS HIS GUN TO FAUST’S FOREHEAD.

6 FAUST/small: Please...please...I surrender...

7 FAUST/small: ...don’t put a bullet in me...please...

8 RALPH:           With THIS? Faust, it’s NOT a HANDGUN.

PANEL FIVE: FAUST’S POV, ON RALPH, STARING DOWN THE GUN AT  
US. IT GLOWS FAINTLY WITH MAGIC.

9 RALPH:           It’s a WISHING GUN.

**PAGE FOURTEEN, NO ART CHANGES**

PANEL ONE: RALPH.

- 1 RALPH: Souvenir from a CASE. ALTONIO ANSELMO, Magician GANGSTER. Claimed to have ruled the Boston UNDERWORLD with enchanted FIREARMS.
- 2 RALPH: Load a BULLET...make a WISH...and FIRE.
- 3 RALPH: I didn't buy it at the time, but after you lose what I lost, desperation overrides LOGIC.

PANEL TWO: FLASHBACK TO ISSUE ONE, RALPH PREPARING TO PUT THE GUN IN HIS MOUTH, CELLPHONE AT HIS FEET.

- 4 CAPTION: "I had no idea what, if anything, would happen when I fingered that trigger..."
- 5 RALPH/whisper: I wish I were with SUE.
- 6 ELECTRIC/from phone: Message two:

PANEL THREE: FLASHBACK TO RALPH WITH THE GUN IN HIS MOUTH AS HE HEARS HIS VOICEMAIL.

- 7 CAPTION: "...but in retrospect, I doubt it's CHANCE that that's the moment this entire journey STARTED."
- 8 ELECTRIC: Mr. Dibny? This is ELYSIUM MORTUARY...

((more))

**PAGE FOURTEEN, continued, REVISED DIALOGUE (\*) 12/5/06**

PANEL FOUR: FAUST (WEAK, PLEADING, STILL ON HIS KNEES BEFORE RALPH). RALPH CONTINUES TO HOLD THE GUN ON HIM.

9 FAUST: Is it a CONFESSION you want? FINE! ALL RIGHT! It WAS me! It was ALL me!

10 FAUST: The STORY I told you...about buh-bargaining my SOUL to NERON...

11 RALPH: ...ham-handed theater, what with the illusion of you ALREADY in hell...

12 FAUST: ...was TRUE! But he g-gave me an OUT!

13 RALPH: NERON did.

PANEL FIVE: SAME, NEW ANGLE.

14 FAUST: He really DID offer to tuh-trade power for a soul p-pure and stuhSTRONG at its moment of g-greatest DESPAIR...so I ch-chose YOURS!

15 FAUST: I f-figured that if I guh-ground you D-DOWN...enough...

\*16 RALPH: ...I'd either walk into your "say the INCANTATION, Ralph" trap and DIE, or blow my OWN head off...either one, a WIN for you...

17 RALPH: ...over my dead BODY.

**PAGE FIFTEEN, NO ART CHANGES**

PANEL ONE: RALPH, FAUST. FAUST IS COWERING, RALPH IS IN HIS FACE, LITERALLY SCREAMING AT HIM AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS.

1 FAUST: I--

2 RALPH/burst: --did NOTHING that wasn't PREORDAINED the moment I made my WISH, you CHARLATAN!

3 RALPH/burst: "The End is already WRITTEN!" You JUST DON'T GET IT! You had NO CHANCE, because I was NEVER caught in your spell!

PANEL TWO: SUPER-TIGHT ON RALPH, STILL SCREAMING.

4 RALPH/HUGE: YOU WERE CAUGHT IN MINE!

PANEL THREE: RALPH LOOKS DOWN ON FAUST IN CONTEMPT AS FAUST GRABS RALPH, PLEADS FRANTICALLY.

5 RALPH: And so is NERON. I assume he's on his way to claim SOMEONE'S soul...

6 FAUST: I P-PROMISED him YOURS--

7 FAUST/burst: HELP ME! H-HELP ME FIND A REPLACEMENT! QUICKLY! Before it's too LATE!

PANEL FOUR: ENRAGED, USING ONE LAST ELONGATED FIST--I KNOW I SAID NO MORE STRETCHING, BUT I WAS WRONG--RALPH SMASHES FAUST VICIOUSLY ACROSS A TABLE OF ARTIFACTS AND SUCH.

PANEL FIVE: ON RALPH, SEETHING.

8 RALPH: Sorry.

9 RALPH: Guess I'm just too P-PURE and stuhSTRONG.

PANEL SIX: FAUST BEGINS TO WITHER AND ROT--LITERALLY ROT LIKE BAD FRUIT--AS NERON'S GIANT HAND REACHES IN FROM OFF TO SEIZE HIM.

10 FAUST: NO!

11 FAUST/burst: NO!

12 FAUST/huge burst: N00000000!



**PAGE SIXTEEN, DIALOGUE REVISED (\*) 12/5/06**

PANEL ONE: NERON--HUGE, AT LEAST DOUBLE RALPH'S SIZE, IF NOT BIGGER--HOVERS IN MIST ACROSS THE ROOM SEVERAL YARDS AWAY. HE'S HOLDING FAUST'S WRITHING, ROTTED SPIRIT IN A SPELL-GLOBE, BUT HE'S SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO RALPH.

1 RALPH: NERON, I presume.

PANEL TWO: FAUST, SUFFERING.

2 NERON: Don't mind me. I have no business with you.  
I'm merely taking my toy and going HOME.

PANEL THREE: BUT AS NERON, HOLDING FAUST, TURNS TO EXIT, HE SCREAMS OUT IN PAIN, A MAGICAL "HOLDING WEB" BLOCKING HIS EXIT.

3 NERON/burst: AAAAAAGGH!

4 RALPH/off: Like HELL.

PANEL FOUR: NERON, INCENSED, WHIRLS ON SMUG RALPH.

5 RALPH: Spell of BINDING, Neron. It's still in  
FORCE. You can't take ANYTHING from within  
these WALLS without MY PERMISSION.

\*6 NERON/BURST: HOW DARE YOU?

**PAGE SEVENTEEN, REVISED 12/5/06**  
**(ART REVISIONS BEGIN HERE!)**

PANEL ONE: NERON--WHO IS HUGE, REMEMBER--GRABS RALPH AND SLAMS HIM INTO A WALL, PINNING HIM.

1 NERON/burst: I am OWED! I AM OWED!

PANEL TWO: NERON HOLDS RALPH TO THE WALL, ITS MASONRY CRACKING FROM THE PRESSURE, RALPH'S NOSE BLOODIED, BUT RALPH JUST GRINS.

2 NERON: I will NOT BE CHEATED OF MY DUE BY A CARNIVAL RUBBER MAN!

3 RALPH: You're not =kaff= being cheated. You're being OUTWITTED.

4 RALPH: The RULES are YOURS. YOU'RE the one who operates only through BARGAINS. You want FAUST?

PANEL THREE: STILL INCENSED WITH FUMING, SILENT RAGE, NERON LETS RALPH GO. RALPH SLUMPS TO THE FLOOR.

5 NERON: ...

6 NERON/small: Yes.

PANEL FOUR: TIGHT ON RALPH, WIPING HIS BLOODY NOSE, SMILING WRYLY.

7 RALPH: Then let's BARTER.

PANEL FIVE: NERON GRINS, FURROWS HIS BROW AS IF TO SAY "ARE YOU KIDDING ME?" AS HE REGARDS ROTTED, FRAIL, SCREAMING FAUST.

8 NERON: For WHAT? I won't bring her BACK, Dibny. Not in exchange for payment as meager as THIS.

9 NERON: ...

10 NERON: UnLESS...

**PAGE EIGHTEEN, REVISED 12/5/06**

PANEL ONE: WITH A MAGICAL GESTURE AND A LITTLE GLOWING ENERGY, NERON RAISES RALPH'S GUN-HAND SO IT'S LEVELED RIGHT AT FAUST. RALPH IS A BIT SURPRISED BY THIS.

1 NERON: Take the SHOT.

2 NERON: Wish your enemy a thousand times DEAD for the AGONY he has PUT you through...and Sue RETURNS. Right HERE, right NOW.

PANEL TWO: THE MOST DRAMATIC ANGLE YOU CAN COME UP WITH OF FAUST, WEEPING, IN RALPH'S SIGHTS, CERTAIN HE'S ABOUT TO DIE. NO DIALOGUE.

PANEL THREE: ON RALPH, DROPPING HIS GUN-HAND BACK DOWN, THE GUN GLOWING WITH WISH-ENERGY AGAIN.

3 RALPH: No.

4 RALPH: I didn't make that deal with the SPECTRE, and I KNOW HIM. Besides, you're working off an OUTDATED WISH.

PANEL FOUR: ON THE GUN, GLOWING WITH WISH-ENERGY.

5 RALPH/off: I've changed the SPELL.

PANEL FIVE: RALPH, CROUCHING, FISHES AROUND THROUGH THE FALLEN ARTIFACTS FROM THE FIRST SEQUENCE, IS PICKING A PHOTOGRAPH OFF ONE AND HOLDING IT AT SUCH AN ANGLE THAT WE CAN'T SEE IT. (KEITH, I THINK IT'S BETTER IF IT COMES FROM AMONG THE FALLEN PHOTOS THAN FROM RALPH'S JACKET POCKET-- THAT WAY, WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT IT'S A PHOTO OF SOMETHING AND NOT JUST SOME OTHER PIECE OF PAPER.)

6 RALPH: Sue would never want to be BROUGHT back...not at the price you're asking.

7 RALPH: But I GET that there's ALWAYS a price.

8 RALPH: So enough NEGOTIATING.

((more))



**PAGE EIGHTEEN, REVISED 12/5/06, continued**

PANEL SIX: HOLDING IT DRAMATICALLY, PRACTICALLY IN NERON'S FACE, RALPH SHOWS THE PHOTO TO NERON, WHO LOOKS INTRIGUED. AGAIN, NEITHER THE READERS NOR FAUST CAN SEE THE PHOTO. IN FACT, WE WON'T SEE IT UNTIL ISSUE 52. (KEITH, CAN WE MOVE IN MUCH CLOSER ON THIS SHOT THIS TIME? NERON CROUCHED A LITTLE LOWER SO RALPH CAN FACE HIM, RALPH REALLY SHOVING THE PHOTO INTO NERON'S FACE WITH A SENSE OF MOVEMENT AND URGENCY? THANKS!)

9 RALPH: THIS is my FINAL OFFER.

10 RALPH: This is what I WANT.

11 RALPH: This is ALL I want.

**PAGE NINETEEN, DIALOGUE REVISED 12/5/06**  
**(WAS PAGE 18--NO ART CHANGES!)**

PANEL ONE: RALPH, *NO LONGER TUCKING THE PHOTO INTO HIS SHIRT POCKET, JUST HOLDING IT*, TOSSES THE WISHING GUN UNDERHAND ACROSS THE ROOM--

\*1 RALPH: And this is what I'm willing to PAY.

\*2 RALPH: Give me my WISH.

PANEL TWO: --AND NERON CATCHES IT--

PANEL THREE: --AND SMILES HIS WICKED SMILE.

3 NERON: It's a DEAL.

PANELS: GESTURING WITH MAGIC, NERON--STILL STANDING ACROSS THE ROOM--PULLS RALPH'S WEDDING RING OFF THE FLOOR--

--SHAPES IT INTO A BULLET--

--AND, BY HAND, INSERTS THE BULLET INTO THE GUN.

**PAGE TWENTY, REVISED 12/5/06**  
**(WAS PAGE 19--NO ART CHANGES!)**

PANEL ONE, BIG: MAYBE IN SILHOUETTE--FOR TASTE  
CONSIDERATIONS MORE THAN TO CREATE MYSTERY, BECAUSE WHAT'S  
HAPPENED IS CLEAR--NERON SHOOTS RALPH ONCE THROUGH THE  
HEART--

PANELS TWO AND THREE: --AND NERON, SMILING EVILLY DOWN AT  
RALPH'S CORPSE, FADES AWAY, AS DOES RALPH'S CORPSE. FAUST  
IS ALL OVERWROUGHT AND PANICKY, PLEADING HIS CASE.

1 FAUST: WAIT! I did this! I gave you Ralph Dibny's  
SUICIDE! Take his SOUL! THAT WAS OUR  
BARGAIN!

2 FAUST: If he wished to DIE--!

3 NERON: Wrong AGAIN, you maggot.

4 FAUST/fades: Then WHAT--? What was his WISH?

PANEL FOUR: --LEAVING THE TOWER EMPTY.

**PAGE TWENTY-ONE and TWENTY-TWO, REVISED 12/5/06**

KEITH: TAKE THE BREAKDOWNS FROM PREVIOUS-DRAFT PAGE TWENTY AND SPREAD THEM OVER TWO PAGES. BREAK AFTER WHAT YOU HAD AS PANEL FIVE--

1 CAPTION: "What WAS it?"

--THEN MAKE NEW PAGE TWENTY-TWO SAME AS WHAT YOU HAD AS PANEL SIX, BUT A  $\frac{3}{4}$  SPLASH--

--WITH A LOWER-RIGHT INSET PANEL CLOSE ON RALPH'S HAND STILL HOLDING THE PHOTO, BUT IT'S STILL TURNED AWAY FROM US SO WE CAN'T SEE IT--LEAVING ONE MYSTERY YET TO BE RESOLVED.

2 CAPTION: "WHAT?"

**NEXT IN 52...**